



CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Phone: (703) 351-7676

29 January 1980

STAT

Mr. James B. Wilson
Editor
Burlington Times-News
707 South Main Street
Burlington, N.C. 27215

Dear Mr. Wilson:

I have just seen your editorial of January 7, "The CIA, Why Are We So Surprised?"

Providing your readers with editorial judgments which they trust and believe is an awesome responsibility. To provide such judgments based on false information without any attempt to verify your facts is faulty journalism at best.

You reported that "no one knows how much it costs to operate this intelligence agency," and that "it is likely that this agency never has to justify its budget requests." You surmised that CIA operates "behind a cloak without public, or even governmental, scrutiny." You declared that "someone, somewhere needs to force a look at this agency and determine just what it is doing and how much it is costing to do whatever is being done."

Where have you been?

In January of 1978 President Carter signed Executive Order 12036, "United States Intelligence Activities" which spells out in great detail what the CIA can and cannot do. Nearly 3 years ago the President created the Intelligence Oversight Board (IOB) whose only mission is to look over and into the activities of this country's intelligence apparatus. Both Houses of Congress have created committees for precisely the same purpose-- The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (May 19, 1976) and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (July 24, 1977). Both committees are now working on Charter Legislation to provide laws to direct and limit our intelligence activities.

The CIA is subject to the same rigorous budget process as other government organizations. Its budget is carefully scrutinized by the Office of Management and Budget and by the President before it is forwarded to Congress for additional in-depth inspection by four Committees of Congress. Programs are challenged and justified at every turn, as they should be.

I urge you next time to check the facts before you launch into an editorial tirade. My office is here to help you in that regard. Your readers deserve the whole truth.

Those in the CIA who work for the citizens of the United States in a thankless and often dangerous profession are deeply hurt by your uninformed allegations.

Sincerely,

Herbert E. Hetu

Herbert E. Hetu
Director of Public Affairs

Attachment:
E.O. 12036

STAT

BURLINGTON TIMES-NEWS (N. C.)
7 January 1980

The CIA

Why are we so surprised?

The United States Central Intelligence Agency has been under fire in recent years, and not without good reason.

The activities of this clandestine organization have been hidden from the public and from the people in government who are supposed to monitor its operations, and some of its activities have created problems which have been difficult for this nation.

Now, with recent events around the world being vividly in front of our eyes, questions must be raised about the effectiveness of this group of secret operatives.

Why did this nation not know of the difficulties that were taking place prior to the overthrow of the Shah of Iran? The CIA should have known what was about to happen if it had been doing its secret job of gathering information about the internal affairs of other nations.

Yet, the action there came as a surprise.

And what about the sudden attack by the Soviet Union on the nation of Afghanistan more recently?

That certainly came as a surprise to the folks in Washington. Or if they knew about it, they kept it a secret for reasons unknown.

Had the United States known in advance what the Soviets were planning, pressure could have been brought to bear in advance of the action. But after it has taken place, there is little this country can do but say it is a dastardly deed.

There must have been a lot of activity in the Soviet Union prior to an invasion of such massive proportions, and such activity certainly would have come to the attention of

an intelligence operation of the magnitude and efficiency as the one we have been led to believe is conducted by the United States.

But the invasion was a surprise to Jimmy Carter and the rest of the folks in Washington.

These situations lead one to wonder just where the CIA has been.

Has its operations become so muddled in bureaucracy that it no longer operates with any degree of efficiency? Is it tuned in to what is happening in the world?

No one knows how much it costs to operate this intelligence agency.

That's a dark secret, just like everything else in the CIA. And because of the secrecy, it is likely that this agency never has to justify its budget requests.

The CIA has become a big and powerful organization, so big and powerful that it has become almost an independent agency, operating behind a cloak without public, or even governmental, scrutiny. When someone pries, the CIA can go on the defensive by saying that its activities must be kept secret in order for it to perform its work.

And as long as this goes on, the agency can become a world apart from the other arms of the government.

Someone, somewhere needs to force a look at this agency and determine just what it is doing and how much it is costing to do whatever is being done.

But with the recent surprises on the international scene, it would be interesting first to find out just what it is that the CIA has been doing.